

9
Florence. 17 December 1849.

My dear Miss Browne,

Without any apology for our long silence, let me hope you are in the best health, that your mother is better, and that Margaret is never ailing; to which I add a merry Xmas and a happy new year to all. Now, with these good wishes, I may begin.

A few days ago I received a letter from the Galignani in Paris telling me they are on the eve of publishing the works of Thackeray, and asking for his autograph. I sent it to them, with a letter stating it was always my intention to write his life, and annex it to a Tragedy of his, together with some unpublished poems in my possession, whenever his countrymen should have learnt to value his poetry. I also told them I believed that time was arrived, as needs it must, sooner or later; but that I was fearful it was too late for me to enter into any arrangement with them. Whatever their answer may be, I am resolved to write his life, persuaded that no one, except yourself, knew him better. Leigh Hunt's account of him is worse than disappointing; I cannot bear it; it seems as if Hunt was so impressed by his illness, that he had utterly forgotten him in health. This is a dreadful mistake, because it is our duty to his memory to show the man his enemies had effected; and I will not spare them. It is not my present purpose to enter into any criticism on his works, but to let it be simply a biography; and, to make that as vivid as possible, I shall incorporate into it passages from letters to me, and to his brothers, - which last are in my possession; together with passages from particular poems, or entire ones, relating to himself, always avoiding those which regard

you, unless you let me know that I may, without mentioning your name, introduce them. There are, however, two of his letters which I wish to give entire; one written when he despaired of Fanny's recovery, the other when he despaired of his own. This latter one is of the most painful description; therefore I wish it to be known, that Gifford and Lockhart may be thoroughly hated and despised. The question is whether you will object to it; I think you will not. Though much of it regards you, your name is never once mentioned. There again, those poems addressed to you, which you permitted me to copy, — may I publish them? It is impossible for me to judge of your feelings on the subject; but whatever they are, you are certain that I shall obey them. To my mind, you ought to consent, as no greater honour can be paid to a woman than to be beloved by such a man as Keats. I am aware that, at a more recent period, you would have been startled at its being alluded to; but consider that eight years have now passed away; and now no one if you do not, can object to it. Besides, Keats has alluded to you; and what more will it be to give his poems addressed to that lady? Your name will still remain as secret to the world as before. I shall of course scrupulously avoid intimating who you are, or in what part of England you reside. As his love for you formed so great a part of him, we may be doing him an injustice in being silent on it. Indeed ^{especially as Keats has said something} something must be said. We live among strange customs; for had you been husband and wife, though but for an hour, every one would have thought himself at liberty publicly to speak of, and all about you, but as you were only so in your hearts, it seems, as it were, improper. Think of it in your best train for thinking, my dear Miss Browne, and let me know your decision. I have turned it in my mind a great deal and find nothing, — to confess the truth freely, — against it.

9 9
Three months ago I heard you were at Bruges, on a visit to
your aunt; but I suppose you are, by this time, returned. Give my
kindest remembrances to Mr. Brown and Margaret. Carlos and I
lead very comfortable, happy, healthy lives, with short lessons, long
walks, and, now and then, a game at romps, or a "ballo grande" at
the Opera. Believe me always

Yours most sincerely,

Chas. Brown.

